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THE *ŚAIVA ĀGAMA*-S AND THE FUNDAMENTAL *ŚAIVA* CONCEPTS

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As the four Veda-s are considered to be the basis for all Indian philosophical systems (called *āstika*) and are held to be the fundamental scriptures, there are also a special kind of scriptures (*viśeṣaśāstra*) for Śaivism called *Āgama* held to have been revealed by Śiva. Both the *Veda*-s and the *Āgama*-s are considered to be authoritative by the Śaivasiddhānta system. वेदोऽखिलो धर्ममूलम्- is the well-known axiomatic saying by which we come to know that the entire Vedic corpus is the fundamental basis for all the *'dharma*-s*'*. The Vedic tradition is being continued by the *Purāṇa*-s and the *Āgama*-s with more addition and elaborations.

The *Purāṇa*-s and the *Āgama-s* are two foundational corpuses that have influenced the formation of popular religious practices and moulding their developments in the course of centuries.

Of them, the *Purāṇa*-s are considered to be *smṛti*-s based entirely on the *Veda*-s which arose mainly to popularize and propagate vedic ideals to all strata of society reaching out even to the lowest class. They do not have independent validity apart from the *Veda*-s. While the *Purāṇa*-s do not claim any divine origin as they are the recordings, by the sages, of contemporary religious practices along with the 'historical legends' and other popular legends with the sole aim of infusing strong devotion to the supreme god in various forms and deep faith in the *vaidika* and the *smārta* systems, the *Śaivāgama*-s stand altogether on a different level.

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The case of the *Āgama*-s and especially the *Śaivāgaṃa*-s are on the other hand a parallel tradition to the *Veda*-s which are considered to elaborate the main Vedic elements without being contradictory to them. We also find in the *Śaivāgama*-s many of the basic views in matters of doctrines as well as in that of rites pertaining to the Vedic tradition are being incorporated. But it should be added that the *Āgama*-s have their own independent way of incorporating these Vedic elements into their own tradition.

Notably among the great *Ācārya*-s we see that Haradatta, Śrīkaṇṭha who are the first to write a commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*-s from the *Śaiva* standpoint and Śrīkumāra who had written an elaborate commentary on the *Śaiva* text *Tattvaprakāśa* of king Bhoja, to cite a few of them, argue for the view that the *Śaivāgama*-s and the *Veda*-s constitute a continuous comprehensive corpus without showing any break in the tradition.

A Brief Presentation on the Contents of the *Śaivāgama*-s

The *Śaivāgama*-s as are now available to us contain a detailed and thorough ritual scheme for achieving the highest spiritual end, liberation (*mokṣa*) as well as rites for achieving worldly enjoyments *(bhoga)*. In order to perform the religious rites the *Āgama*-s have well-formulated philosophical doctrines that serve as the basis. Further, they also have a detailed scheme of *mantra*-s that are inseparable from the religious rites. Since these texts strive to chalk out a detailed plan of religious activity they also accord a very important place for yogic disciplines. Based on the *Kuṇḍalinī yoga* system they have a detailed picture of different *nāḍī*-s, *prāṇāyāma* practices, etc. Finally as a self-contained religious system the *Āgama*-s have a separate code of conduct with elaborate rules and regulations that an initiated adept should put into practise. These four broad categories of subject matter that the *Āgama*-s are supposed ideally to contain are called *vidyā* or *jñāna*, *kriyā*, *yoga* and *caryā*.

Traditionally there are 28 fundamental *Āgama*-s *(mūlāgama)* for the *Śaivasiddhānta* system. They were held to have been revealed by Śiva to various gods and from them to different sages and finally to human beings. The

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corpus of these texts that we have now is said to be much abridged and comprehensible by the limited intelligence of modern man.

There is also another type of division of the *Āgama* into three: *Tantrakalā, Mantrakalā* and *Upadeśakalā*. The first explains in detail the performance of various rites such as the *yāga*-s and the worship of Śiva; the second explains the *mantra*-s, various meditations, etc. and the third speaks about the philosophical doctrines such as the highest reality, Śiva, the evolution of various *tattva*-s, etc.[1]

Notable special features of these *Āgama*-s are: They teach the worship of a single supreme God, the *Pāti*, who possesses unlimited power of knowledge and action, from whom, through the medium of His *Śakti*, the world of sound and form emerges. The *Śaivāgama*-s also teach a special form of initiation *(dīkṣā)* to the adherents which is considered to be the basic requirement to enter into the spiritual practices enunciated in these texts. The individual self, known as *Paśu*, is considered to possess all the divine qualities of Śiva in a potential form which it regains or manifests in liberation. Another noteworthy feature of these *Śaivāgama*-s is that they prescribe the public worship of Śiva in a constructed temple and thus give elaborate details on this topic. In the domain of doctrines, to note a distinct trait, the *Śaivāgama*-s consider the external world as real and existent and therefore the human predicament in the world also as real. What is more, every experience and mental mode of the self is accounted for and the solution to transcend them and realize the innate Śivahood of the self is offered. It should also be noted that Yoga plays a vital role in all the spiritual practices. The visualization combined with deep devotion permeated by an intimate inner perception of the divinity is the distinct mark of all the *Śaivāgamic* rites. In fact the rituals are so enunciated to serve as the concrete externalization of the lofty philosophical concepts.

Generally the doctrines and the rituals expounded in the *Śaivāgama*-s which are the fundamental texts for this tradition are held to be superior to

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1. Śivāgrayogī's Commentary on *Civañāṇacittiyār*, Chapter on *Aḷavaiyilakkaṇam*, p. 13.

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those expounded in the Veda and other allied texts. Taking the case of the philosophical doctrines one finds the view that though a person is well-read and practises those spiritual ideas such as the Vedānta and sufficiently advances he cannot attain to the highest goal so long as he is not initiated into the Śaiva system and regularly practices the ritual injunctions with a firm knowledge in the philosophical doctrines as delineated in the *Śaivāgama*-s. (See the commentary of Rāmakaṇṭha on the *Matańgapārameśvarāgama,* VP. 1:5. Cf. also the *Kāmikāgama*, 1:15-18 for similar views) Scriptures that are broadly divided into two-*para* and *apara*-higher and lower; those texts that speak of only the worldly science and the individual self are considered to be lower (*apara*) while that which enlightens about the supreme self, namely, Śiva is the highest (*para*). Accordingly the *Āgama* texts belonging to the Śaivasiddhānta system of religion and philosophy are the highest as they expound not only the matter and self but also the supreme and highest being, namely, Śiva.

धर्मा बहुविधाः ख्यातास्तत्तदागमचोदिताः ।
नहि ते मुख्यधर्माः स्युर्मुख्यधर्माः शिवोदिताः ॥

Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati, KP. 1: 5

The *Kāmikāgama* passage:

लौकिकं वैदिकं चैव तथाध्यात्मिकमेव च ।
अतिमार्गं च मन्त्राख्यं तन्त्रमेकमनेकधा ॥

This divides the entire scriptural corpus into five broad categories by classifying the *Śaivāgama*-s as the *'mantra'* system. While all the scriptures of the different systems are valid within their own limited conceptions. The Śaivasiddhānta is the highest and supreme one as the fruit it offers in the form *mokṣa* is the highest conception.

Special Features of the *Śaivāgama*-s

While both the *Āgama*-s and the Veda-s are equally valid, the *Śaivāgama*-s are held to be superior (*Mokṣakārikā*, and comm.). The other philosophical systems such as the Sāṃkhya, Vedānta, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Jaina, Bauddha, etc. were taught by persons of limited knowledge who are not free from impurities *(sāñjana)*; they discuss only those concepts that are sublated by further

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investigation and these philosophical systems do not have clear views regarding the self *(pumān)*, the supreme controller *(pati)*, the bondage *(bandha)* and final liberation *(apavarga)*. The Śaiva scriptures, on the other hand, propound a detailed analysis of the concepts of the self *(Paśu)*, the bondages *(Pāśa)* and bring out the special features of them that are not spoken by the other systems, and which views are incontrovertible (*Mokṣakārikā*, VV. 140-143 and the commentary of Rāmakaṇṭha thereon and *Mṛgeṇdrāgama*, VP. 2: 11). These are some of the reasons that make the *Śaivāgama*-s acceptable to all.

The main contribution of the *Śaivāgama*-s is that they do not refute the rival systems as incorrect but bring in corrections to the partial views of those systems on matters concerning the individual self and the bondage by stating the actual and unsublatable views. (*Ibid.* VV. 144-45). In fact the *Śaivāgama*-s, after explaining the different states sought to be attained by all rival systems, show clearly its own supreme state to be attained that has not been even thought of by the rival doctrinal systems. (Rāmakaṇṭha's commentary on the *Matańgapārameśvarāgama*, VP. 1: 25-25 and also Aghoraśiva's sub-commentary *Dīpikā* on the *Mṛgendrāgama*,VP. 2:2)

To follow the order of the *Matańgapārameśvarāgama*, the *vidyāpāda* [of the *Śaivāgama*] expounds in detail with due logical arguments, the nature of the *tattva*-s, their cause and their effect as well as those that are to be discarded. It also deals with the categories such as *Pati*, etc.

ज्ञायन्ते येन पत्याद्याः पदार्थाः षड् द्विजोत्तमाः ।
तद् ज्ञानपादमित्युक्तं साधनं देशिकात्मनाम् ॥

The nature of the *mudrā*-s, *maṇḍala*-s and the *mantra*-s along with the characteristics of different types of Śaiva initiates such as Sādhaka, Ācārya, the daily obligatory rites and the important rite of initiation *(dīkṣā)* are explained in the *kriyāpāda;* the *yogapāda* deals with the subject of Yoga composed of six limbs the performance of which bestows both liberation *(mukti)* and higher enjoyments *(bhoga)* while the *caryāpāda* treats the special practices to be adopted by the different types of Śaiva initiates. With some amount of certainty we can say that though all the four *pāda*-s in their well-marked form are not

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available to us, many of the *Āgama*-s do contain the subject matters related to all these four *pāda*-s.

Contents of the *Śaivāgama*-s

Being revealed scriptures and fundamental to the entire development of the system of *Śaivasiddhānta*, the *Āgama*-s are the storehouse of a vast range of subjects. Even the available ones contain a variety of subject matters under the four broad divisions. Without being exhaustive, we will attempt to give an outline of the subjets treated in the available *Śaivāgama*-s of which many remain in manuscript form.

Kriyāpāda

This section deals with almost all types of rites; the rites are generally divided into three types: the daily obligatory rites *(nitya)*[2], the occasional rites *(naimittika)*[3] and optional rites done with an aim to get some desired fruits *(kāmya)*. It is one of the special features of the *Śaivasiddhānta* traditions (and which is not found in other *Āgamic* traditions) that there are many ritual manuals (called *paddhati*-s) that treat the method of performance of these various rites.

Pavitrasamarpaṇa is an occasional rite performed obligatorily once a year to make good for any omissions and other faults committed during worship in the course of that year.

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2. One of the earlier ritual manuals, *Jñānaratnāvali* composed by Jñānaśambhu (*circa* 11th Century) enumerates them as five by citing passages from the *Kālottarāgama* : the daily bath *(snāna)*, worship [of Śiva] *(pūjā)*, repetition of *mantra*-s *(japa)*, meditation *(dhyāna)* and fire-worship *(homa)*. (*Jñānaratnāvali*, paper transcript of the French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP), P. 231)

3. *Ibid*, Initiation *(Dīkṣā)* and installation [of Śivaliṅga in the temple] *(pratiṣṭhā)* are the two basic rites that form part of the occasional ones.

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Rites of atonement *(prāyaścitta)* occupy an important place in the *Āgama-s.* Various types of rites such as special fire-worship *(homa)*, recitation of different *mantra-s (japa)* for a large number of times, etc. are some form of *prāyaścitta* rites.

Occasional Rites

Under this head many rites are grouped according to the various types of installation (for example installing a *Liṅga* for domestic worship and the same for public worship in the temple, construction and installation of a monastery[4], of a well or of a water-tank for public utility, installation of the Book of *Āgama*-s *(vidyāpīṭha)* for daily worship,[5] etc.) The rite of initiation *(dīkṣā)* which is one of the fundamental rites of Śaivasiddhānta that enables a person to officially 'enter' into Śaiva fold and practise the prescribed rites and which is considered to be a prerequisite for obtaining liberation *(mukti)* which at the same time bestows great enjoyments *(bhoga)* in various worlds is another occasional rite.

Temple Rites

There are many number of rites concerned with the temple of Śiva. Generally they are grouped under three heads:

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4. The *Kāmikāgama* defines a monastery *(maṭha)* which serve as the place for staying for visitors and celibates (*naiṣṭhika*) or that which supplies food, etc. for visitors.

5. (a) The worship of the Seat of Knowledge--*Vidyāpīṭha*-where the 'seat' is composed of the *Śaivāgama*-s written on palm-leaves and made into bundles and worshipped daily by the *Ācārya*, is one of the important features of the Śaiva tradition. Some *Āgama*-s such as the *Aṃśumad*, *Kāmikāgama* and the *Vīrāgama* treat this rites elaborately.

(b) The *Śivadharmottara*, one of the ancient texts dealing with basic aspects of Śaivism in a general way and considered as one of the *Upāgama*-s of the *Śaivasiddhānta* tradition and hence an authority, deals in a detailed way the method of writing the book of *Āgama*, its installation and other rites.

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Those rites beginning from the first ploughing *(karṣaṇa)* of the ground selected for the construction and ending with the installation of the *Liṅga (pratiṣṭha)* at the sanctum; hence this group is called *karṣaṇadipratiṣṭhānta.*

The next group of rites is called *'pratiṣṭhādi utsavānta'*-those [rites] that commence with the installation [of the Liṅga] and end with the celebration of the festival *(utsava).* The next series of rites are grouped under the category 'beginning from festival and ending with atonement rites' *(Utsavādiprāyaścittānta).*

Caryāpāda

This section consists of general as well as special conducts of the different types of initiated *Śaiva*-s such as the *Samayī*, the *Ācārya*, those who take to intense *Śaiva* vow for a certain period *(vratī)*, etc.

Yogapāda

In the *Śaiva* tradition the word yoga is interpreted as derived from the verbal root *'yujir'* meaning union which is the union with Śiva.[6] The importance and inevitability of practice of yoga is that even though an initiated *Sādhaka* possesses sound knowledge on the basic categories such as *pati, paśu*, etc. of the *Śaivasiddhānta* system it is the *yoga* practices such as the *prāṇāyāma* and *samādhi* that reinforce his knowledge about the self and make Śiva-experience *(Śivānubhava)* strong and direct.

Vidyāpāda

That section of the *Āgama* where the discussion on the philosophical categories *(tattva)* with an aim to inculcate the correct views after discarding the wrong ones is done, is the *vidyāpāda.*[7] While the three foregone parts-*kriyā, yoga* and *caryā*- are the means prescribed out of compassion towards the bound selves by Śiva to attain Śivahood, the *jñānapāda* expounds in detail all the doctrines that the self is supposed to know in order to put into practice.[8]

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6. *Cintyaviśvāgama;* Also Aghoraśiva's introductory part of his commentary on the *Yogapāda* of the *Sarvajñānottarāgama.*
7. *Mataṅgapārameśvarāgama*, VP. 2: 9 and the commentary of Rāmakaṇṭha thereon.
8. The commentary *Vṛtti* of Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha on *Mṛgendrāgama*, VP. 2:2